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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 003283

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SUBJECT: CODEL MEEK DISCUSSES SOMALIA, HR 2003, TERRORIST  
ATTACKS WITH PRIME MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (B) & (D).

Summary

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11. (C) Visiting Congressmen Kendrick Meek, Charles Boustany, and Andre Carson met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on Wednesday, December 3 to discuss the timeline of Ethiopia's withdrawal from Somalia, the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act (H.R. 2003) before Congress, and al-Shabaab ties to recent terrorist activities. Meles reported that Ethiopia plans to withdraw from Somalia by the end of December unless it has reason to believe that the international community will provide transportation assistance for withdrawing African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops, in which case Ethiopia may be willing to wait a few more weeks. Meles insisted that the U.S. Congress trust Ethiopia to democratize in its own time and manner, and maintain open dialogue when human rights issues arise. Meek suggested that the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington strengthen its relationships with the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Members of Congress in order to provide a more complete picture of the Ethiopian Government's (GoE) policies, and to provide the GoE perspective on human rights issues more effectively. Meles stated that the GoE has reason to believe that al-Shabaab carried out recent attacks against Ethiopian targets in Somalia, but as yet has no evidence that al-Shabaab has been involved in piracy. Congressman Meek commended Ethiopia's efforts to combat terrorism in the Horn of Africa. Congressman Boustany emphasized the importance of maintaining an enduring partnership between the U.S. and Ethiopia. Meles noted that Ethiopia's relationship with the U.S. is strong and he hopes it will remain that way. End Summary.

Meles Insists Congress Mind its Own Business

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12. (C) Congressman Meek informed Meles that following their meeting last November, he met with the House Foreign Affairs Committee upon his return to Washington. He assured Meles that better attention would be paid to a resolution similar to the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act if it came to Congress again. (Note: Meek was referring to the fact that H.R. 2003 was presented to the Congress under suspended rules and subjected to only a voice vote. End Note). Meek also suggested that the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington strengthen its relationships with the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Members of Congress in order to provide a more complete picture of the GoE's policies, and to provide the GoE

perspective on human rights issues more effectively.

¶3. (C) Meles said that the GoE has done its best to have a close and predictable relationship with the U.S., and has tried to be as predictable as possible to the U.S. Meles added that the GoE has tried to shield security cooperation efforts from diplomatic ups and downs. Meles hopes and expects that the bilateral relationship becomes more predictable because security in the Horn of Africa is not possible without U.S. help. Ethiopia wants to cooperate on many dimensions with the U.S., but feels the U.S. is unfairly judgmental towards Ethiopia concerning its path to democracy, Meles said. The GoE believes strongly in the process of democratization as a matter of survival, Meles insisted, adding that, "(I)f we don't democratize we'll consume each other like Somalia." If Ethiopia's democratization process pleases others, it is "icing on the cake", Meles explained, noting that Ethiopians are democratizing for no one else but themselves. He also noted that when the U.S. was a young democracy, some perceived imperfections in the Constitution turned out not to be as bad as initially thought.

¶4. (C) Meles reiterated his belief in the respect for "the human person" and said that the GoE's one major mistake has been not responding to allegations of human rights abuses in the past. Recently, the GoE issued a response to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) Report on alleged GoE abuses in the Ogaden, claiming that it is filled with propaganda from the opposition parties, false reports, and faulty research methodology. Meles said that Ethiopia's democratization process requires that others respect Ethiopia's right to make

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decisions for itself, without interference from the U.S. Congress. Meek pointed out that H.R. 2003 was not exclusively targeted at Ethiopia, but there has been similar legislation for other countries. Congressman Boustany insisted that we must find a healthy balance between idealism and realism, and appreciates the GoE's willingness to work with the U.S. Carson expressed hope that as true friends Ethiopia and the U.S. would be able to disagree respectfully and resolve differences.

Ethiopian to Quit Somalia by Year End

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¶5. (C) Meles said that Ethiopian troops will withdraw from Somalia by the end of December. If there is reason to believe that the international community will support AMISOM's withdraw, Meles said that the GoE can postpone its actions for a few weeks, but not indefinitely. Meek asked Meles if he thought it was viable for the international community to respond by the end of the month. Meles responded that he doesn't expect that the UN will take over, but he is hoping for transportation assistance for withdrawing AMISOM troops from Mogadishu. If this doesn't happen, there will be long-term repercussions for African Union (AU) peacekeeping forces, including loss of prestige and reluctance to contribute troops to future peacekeeping missions.

¶6. (C) Meles said that there are two important requirements for stability in Somalia. First, political will is needed on the part of the Somali clans, which Meles believes does not exist. He said that fighting between Somali clans has existed for years and is likely exacerbated by the presence of Ethiopian troops. Second, it requires comprehensive support from the international community to maintain peacekeeping forces. Meles criticized the international community as being "broadly supportive but not fully engaged." He cited the financial burden on Ethiopia of maintaining troops in Somalia and the lack of resources for AMISOM, which has only deployed one quarter of the 8,000 proposed peacekeepers. When Ethiopia deployed forces to Somalia, the GoE assumed that there would be a transition to AMISOM troops, but Meles said

it has become clear that this will not happen and has decided to withdraw its troops by the end of the year. Since Ethiopia feels it has a moral obligation to secure the withdraw of AMISOM troops, they are willing to wait "perhaps a few more weeks" to withdraw. In response to whether it would be possible to keep AMISOM troops in Somalia absent the GoE presence, Meles said that the AU can provide the impetus, but does not have enough resources. Ethiopia supports the "Blue Hatting" of AMISOM.

17. (C) Meles said that stability in Somalia is currently unrealistic, and so Ethiopian security will better be served from "our side of the border." He said that it is likely that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia will cease to function and sub-clans will take over economically-advantaged areas. He also predicted that inland areas of Somalia might be more stable than areas closer to the sea, and that divided Islamic groups might fight amongst themselves. He also stated that, "The only thing predictable about Somalia is that it is unpredictable." The worst case scenario, said Meles, is that the hundreds of millions of dollars that piracy is generating will be used to fund terrorist activities.

#### Al-Shabaab Connections to Recent Terrorist Activities

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18. (C) When asked about al-Shabaab support for the recent terrorist attacks against Ethiopian targets in Somalia, Meles stated that the GoE has reason to believe that al-Shabaab carried out the attacks. The GoE has detained some suspects, and while the investigations are not complete, there are early indications that it was al-Shabaab. Mr. Carson asked Meles if the recent piracy incidents were connected to al-Shabaab. Meles responded that to the best of Ethiopia's knowledge they are exclusively criminal, but there are indications that this may change in the future. The GoE is also concerned about the increase in Iranian activities in

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Eritrea.  
YAMAMOTO